

AP English Notes
October 26, 2004

Notes from Book Notes

After the chorus, the three priests appear on the stage. The first priest is emotional when he says that seven long years have passed since Becket left for France. The people of Canterbury have suffered silently in his absence. The second priest recollects how during these years, the king was busy in political conspiracies and games. The third priest affirms this statement and says that the king and the barons have enjoyed great power and luxury at the cost of the poor, simple folk of England. He adds that no government has ever helped the people. It seems as if the exploitation of the common people is endless, the powerful have forgotten God, and there is no hope at all.

A messenger breaks the news that the Archbishop has arrived in England and will soon be in Canterbury Cathedral. The priests are happy, but they wonder whether Becket has made peace with the king or whether there will be war. They ask how could there be friendship between the **hammer and the anvil** or between two proud men. They wonder if Becket is coming home with full assurance of safety from the king.

The priests feel worried about Becket's safety. Yet they hope that since Becket is returning amongst them to dispel their doubt, there will be new hope and guidance. They trust he will stand by the people like a solid rock against the tides of political danger. If Becket gets the support of the King of France and of the Pope, he will give strength and courage to the common people. The priests are eager to see their Archbishop now. The third priest observes that they have waited for him patiently as if the wheel of time had stopped. Now, he says, let the wheel turn and their waiting come to an end, for good or for evil. The women of the chorus repeat their idea that they are sensing evil, this time more clearly. They wish that Becket would return to France for his own safety.

The messenger also shares his doubts. He narrates how the people of England are overjoyed to have their Archbishop returning home, how the roads of Canterbury are strewn with leaves and flowers, and how the streets are packed with common people eagerly waiting to give Becket a very warm welcome. With the support of the King, Becket had become a successful, prosperous, and proud man. When he became the Chancellor, he was flattered by the King and held the King's courtiers in awe. When he became the Archbishop, however, the courtiers felt that Becket changed. They believed that Becket started to look down upon them, acting superior to them as their spiritual head. In the process, he created enemies for himself. The messenger further reveals that when Becket went into exile in France, he told the King that they would not meet again. Like the chorus, he seems to be foreshadowing death and evil.

Becket enters and lets the women stay where they are. He believes that in their simplicity and innocence, **they have sensed the design of God, foreshadowing his own death**. The priests apologize to Becket for their simple welcome. Becket replies that he may not have adequate time to enjoy whatever comforts they try to give him. **His enemies have been awaiting him like hungry hawks ready to pounce**, and soon they would come to meet him. He seems to accept that his end is near.

AP English Notes
October 26, 2004

As Becket speaks, the first tempter, uninvited, suddenly appears on stage. He reminds Becket of their old friendship. He tempts Becket by suggesting that Becket can continue to be with the King, with "wit and wine and wisdom." Becket replies that going back to such a life of luxury is not possible. The tempter argues that rejecting the King's favors would be a very proud act. He says that Becket must visit the King and have the best dinners once again. Becket again turns down the offer, and the tempter leaves.

Seven years since the Archbishop left us.

King rules and barons rule . . . we are content if we are left alone.

Chorus of Women

Some malady is coming upon us. We wait, we wait.

All the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be martyrs and saints.

Chorus of Women

Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:

I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.

For us, the poor, there is no action

But only to wait and to witness.

Third Priest

For good or evil, let the wheel turn

The wheel has been still, these seven years . . . let the wheel turn.

Chorus of Women

A fear like birth and death, when we see birth and death alone

We / Are afraid in a fear we cannot know, which we cannot face, which none understand.

. . .our brains unskinned like the layers of an onion

Thomas á Becket, Archbishop

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer,

They know and do not know, that action is suffering.

First Tempter

Old Tom . . . Becket of London

Return to the Past

Lustful Ways

Fluting in the Meadow

Laughter and Apple Blossoms

Whispers in Chambers

Thomas' answer

AP English Notes
October 26, 2004

You talk of seasons that are past.
We do not know much of future
ä Except that from generation to generation
ä The same things happen again and again.

First Tempter

You were not . . . so hard on sinners
When they were your friends.

First Tempter

I'll remember you at kissing-time below the stairs.
Second Tempter
Return as the Chancellor of England
Rule over men --reckon no madness

Becket's Answer to Second Tempter

"Shall I, who keep the keys / Of heaven and hell, supreme alone in England . . . Descend to
desire a punier power?" (Eliot 30)

Second Tempter's Answer

"Then I leave you to your fate" (Eliot 30)

Third Tempter

Join our group and overthrow the king.
He does not understand us.

Becket's Answer to Third Tempter

"No one shall say I betrayed a king" (Eliot 34).